

INTRODUCTION

Household food security – the assured access of all people to enough food for a healthy and active life – has received increasing attention from policymakers and researchers over the past decade. An emerging body of literature has linked food insecurity to a variety of negative outcomes, particularly for children (see, e.g., Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones, 2003, and Olson, 1999), confirming the importance of food security as an indicator of well-being and a legitimate target of public concern.

Estimates of the prevalence of food insecurity are released annually, revealing substantial variability among demographic groups as well as across states. The most recent data show state-level food insecurity rates ranging from a low of 6.2 percent in Massachusetts to a high of 15.5 percent in Arkansas (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson, 2004). Research on the correlates of food insecurity has largely focused on individual and household characteristics, with less attention to the role of the economic, policy, and social contexts in which households reside. There are two purposes, then, of the current report: First, to further our understanding of the relationships between the characteristics of states and the food security of households, and second, to identify the relative role of household and state characteristics in explaining the wide variation in food security among states.